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## **BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES**



**THE MACMILLAN COMPANY**

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**TORONTO**

# BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

BY

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AUTHOR OF "DAILY BREAD," "FIRES," ETC.

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THE MACMILLAN COMPANY

1914

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**TO MY WIFE**





So long had I travelled the lonely road,  
Though, now and again, a wayfaring friend  
Walked shoulder to shoulder, and lightened the  
load,

I often would think to myself as I strode,  
No comrade will journey with you to the end.

And it seemed to me, as the days went past,  
And I gossiped with cronies, or brooded alone,  
By wayside fires, that my fortune was cast  
To sojourn by other men's hearths to the last,  
And never to come to my own hearthstone.

The lonely road no longer I roam.  
We met, and were one in the heart's desire.  
Together we came, through the wintry gloam,  
To the little old house by the cross-ways, home;  
And crossed the threshold, and kindled the fire.



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## **BORDERLANDS**



## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

SCENE: *The Queen's Crag, a fantastic group of rocks and boulders on the fells. MICHAEL CROZIER, a young hind, lies in the evening glow at the foot of the tallest crag, with a far-away look in his eyes. Presently GEORGE DODD, an old hind, enters and stops on seeing MICHAEL.*

GEORGE

Of all the lazy louts!

It's here, then, that you moon away the  
evenings,

Stretched like a collie, basking in the sun,

Your noble self for company!

At your age, Michael, lad,

I'd have thought shame to find myself alone,

A night like this:

And such a lass as Peggie, lonesome, too.



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I wasted little time, when I was young;  
And lost no Summer evenings by myself.  
I always was a lad among the lasses,  
And not a moony, moping gowk like you.  
No sooner was I through,  
Than I was washed and out.  
Sunlight, moonlight, starlight, dark,  
I never missed the screeching of the owls,  
Nor listened to it lonesome.  
But you, I've never seen you with a lass:  
Though Peggie Haliburton, she . . .  
Lad, take your pleasure, while you're young,  
And Summer nights be fine.  
Though youth and Summer nights seem long—  
Long enough to last for ever,  
For ever and a day,  
Before you've looked about a bit,  
Old age and Winter are upon you.

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

To-day you're lithe and lusty,  
And to-morrow,  
A grizzled, pithless, aching bag-of-bones.  
And Peggie Haliburton, too,  
The lass was made for love and Summer nights:  
Yet she's out walking with herself,  
And no one by to see her but the peewits,  
Or, maybe, a cock grouse or so:  
A bonnie young thing wasting.

*(He pauses, looking at MICHAEL, who pays little heed, but still lies with a far-away look in his eyes.)*

But, maybe, Michael, you're like me,  
And cannot 'bide red hair?  
I never liked a red-haired wench,  
If there was any other by.  
Red . . . it's the colour of the fox and  
kestrel,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And stoat and weasel, and such thieves and  
vermin.

And, as for stock, if I could have my way,  
I shouldn't have a red beast on the farm.  
I'd never let a chestnut stallion whinny  
Within a mile of Skarlindyke.

I'd sell all chestnut colts and fillies:

The red bull, too, should go:

And no red heifer should come nigh the  
byres.

I'd have all black, coal-black:

Black stallions and black mares:

Black bulls, black stirks and heifers:

All black, save tups and ewes:

I'm somehow not so partial to black sheep.

But, in this world, we cannot all be farmers,  
And lords of all creation.

Still, even hinds may have their fancies:

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

And you and I, lad, cannot 'bide red hair:  
And so, red Peggy walks alone.  
Ay! and it seems that hinds can hold their  
    tongues,  
At least, the youngsters can;  
For my old tongue keeps wagging,  
And wags to little purpose seemingly.  
It must have lost its sting;  
Or, Peggy's not in favour.

*(A pause.)*

Well, Mister Mum, you've chosen a snug  
    corner  
To stretch your lazy bones in.

*(Sitting down by MICHAEL, with his back against  
    the rock.)*

I think I'll bear you company awhile,  
If you can call a hedgehog company,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Tight-curled, and prickles bristling!  
Still, though you mayn't be over-lively,  
You're livelier than Myself.  
I find him but glum company—  
A grumpy, sulky beggar,  
Who keeps on telling me I'm getting old,  
And 'minding me of happiness gone by.  
Myself and I were never fellows:  
But ill-yoked at the best of times,  
We seldom pulled together:  
And, Lord! the times that we've upset the  
    cart!  
So you must serve to keep the peace between  
    us,  
By listening to my chatter.  
I'm always happiest, talking,  
For then I needn't listen to Myself.  
Though I, when I was your age, Michael,

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

I should have scorned an old man's company,  
While any lass . . .  
And on Midsummer Eve!

*(He pauses again: then resumes, pointing to a pillared rock, standing apart from the others.)*

So, yon's the tooth, chipped out of the  
Queen's comb,

When Arthur pitched a rock at her,  
While she was combing out her yellow hair:  
And he, at his own Crag, a mile away!  
It must have been a spanker of a comb,  
To bear so brave a tooth!

I wonder what she'd said, to make him pitch  
it . . .

Though likely she'd said nothing,  
But just sat combing out her yellow hair,  
And combing, combing, combing.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

A woman with a devil in her tongue,  
When she plays mum, is far more aggravat-  
ing.

Sometimes, when Susan sits and combs her  
hair,

At night, like Arthur's Queen,

And combs, and combs,

Till I'm half-mad with watching from the bed,

I only stop Myself,—

The surly chap who wants the light out,—

Just in the nick of time

To loose the pillow from his clutch.

King Arthur must have been a handsome lad,

To chuck a pebble that size near a mile.

But, there were giants in those days:

And he . . .

MICHAEL

A lie!

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

GEORGE

A lie? Of course, it's all a lie:  
But it's a brave lie, Michael!  
I doubt if there was ever King or Queen,  
In these outlandish parts.

MICHAEL

There was a Queen,  
Though she was not a giant.  
She was no bigger than . . .  
Than you, or me . . .  
Or Peggy . . . she was nearer Peggy's height.

GEORGE

You seem to know a deal about her, Michael.  
Just Peggy's height?  
And red-haired, too, I'll warrant?  
You've found your tongue:



---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And got it pat:

And all the gospel truth!

But, how d'you come by so much truth, I  
wonder?

Scarcely by honest means, I doubt.

And how d'you know . . .

MICHAEL

Because I've seen her.

GEORGE

Who?

MICHAEL

The Queen.

GEORGE

You've seen the Queen?

Well, that's a brave one, Michael!

Myself can sometimes tell a little one;

---

THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

But he was ever but a craven liar.  
His were but cheepy bantams, barely hatched:  
While yours, why, it's a strutting cock, and  
    crowing,  
Comb pricked, and hackles quivering!  
There's nothing like a big, bold, brazen lie  
To warm the blood . . .

MICHAEL

I'm telling truth.  
I've seen her twice.

GEORGE

Nay! stop, before you spoil it all.  
A lie, blown out too big, will burst.

MICHAEL

It is no lie . . .  
I saw the Queen, herself.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

GEORGE

You saw her . . . where?

MICHAEL

I saw her here.

GEORGE

Here? In the Crag?

I trust she's not here now:

And listening down behind the rock.

Lord! if she'd heard Myself about the comb-  
ing!

But Queens should be above eavesdropping;  
And know the luck of listeners.

Though, how d'you know her, lad, for Ar-  
thur's Queen?

Did she sing out:

“Hi! lad, I'm Arthur's Queen!”

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

### MICHAEL

She wore a crown . . .

A golden crown . . .

### GEORGE

I saw a Queen once, with a golden crown;

And sitting on a golden throne,

Set high upon a monster golden ball,

Drawn in a golden chariot through the streets

By four-and-twenty little piebald ponies,

At Hexham, on a fairday, long ago . . .

Ay, long ago, in my young days,

When circuses were circuses.

They made a brave procession through the  
town,

To draw the folk in after them . . .

Though outside shows are usually the brav-  
est . . .

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

But, not that time . . .

She was a Queen, a black-eyed, gypsy  
Queen . . .

Black eyes that sparked . . .

And tilted chin . . .

You never saw . . .

### MICHAEL

Mine was no circus-queen.

I saw her first, when I was but a boy,

Six years ago, to-day . . . Midsummer  
Eve . . .

I'd spent the whole day, playing round the  
Crag

At Kings and castles,

Crowning or killing,

Or conquering myself,

Or putting black-faced bands

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

Of robber-sheep to rout;  
Or seeking to take, unawares,  
Some traitor stoat or weasel  
That spied on my dominions.  
When, ere I knew,  
The sky was black,  
And broke in flame,  
And burst in thunder . . .  
And rain, such rain . . .  
Lightning, flash on flash . . .  
Thunder, brattle after brattle . . .  
Rain and rain . . .  
You never saw such rain—  
One pelting, crashing, teeming, drenching  
    downpour.  
Soaked to the skin, in no time,  
And scared out of my senses,  
I crept into a hole among the rocks,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

A hole I'd never spied before,  
No bigger than a fox's earth.  
I had to wriggle on my belly,  
To squeeze myself in, head first;  
And half-expecting, every moment,  
To feel a vixen's teeth,  
Though more I feared the lightning at my  
    heels.

When, all at once, my arms were free:  
And, lifting up my head, I found  
I'd almost crawled into a chamber,  
A big square chamber in the rock,  
That I had ne'er heard tell of—  
Four blue and shiny walls, that soared  
Sheer to the sky—a still and starry sky,  
Though, in the world without, black storm  
    was raging.

But, I'd no eyes for stars,

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

Nor even wits to wonder at the quiet.  
My eyes were on the Queen,  
Who sat beside a hearth of burning peats,  
Right in the middle of the chamber;  
A golden crown upon her golden head;  
And she was spinning golden wool,  
That flickered in the firelight,  
Until it seemed that she was spinning flame,  
Or her own fire-bright hair.

GEORGE

Red hair! And she'd red hair . . .  
Then, you had only snoozed;  
And dreamt of Peggy.  
I saw my queen by daylight.

MICHAEL

Peggy!  
I tell you, 'twas the Queen.



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I saw her, plainly as I see yon rabbit;  
She wore a furry cloak of weasel skins,  
Or something like,  
Though round the neck 'twas white—  
White as yon rabbit's scut . . .  
For it was mortal cold in that stone chamber.

GEORGE

Was anybody with her?

MICHAEL

I only saw the Queen,  
And her, but for a moment.  
She lifted up her eyes;  
And I was frightened . . .  
And wriggled backwards like an adder,  
Till I was in the storm again.

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

And then, I scuttled home—  
A rabbit to its warren —  
Across the splashy heather:  
The lightning, playing round my heels,  
The thunder, rattling round my head,  
Though it was not the lightning or the  
thunder  
That scared me now . . .  
I'd not a thought for them . . .  
My heart was flying from that quiet cham-  
ber  
That stone-cold chamber, roofed with quiet  
stars . . .  
And from the eyes . . .  
The eyes I had not seen.

GEORGE

And where's this stony chamber, then?

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

MICHAEL

I never found the way to it again,  
Though I've ransacked the Craggs for it,  
Since I grew big, and bolder.

GEORGE

A vixen in her den,  
For she'd be red enough.  
Yet, you'd have felt her teeth for certain!  
It must have been a dream.

MICHAEL

I might have thought so, too,  
Had I not seen the Queen, again.

GEORGE

Again?  
I saw my Queen, again, too.  
But what was your Queen's name?

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

MICHAEL

Queen Guinevere.

GEORGE

Mine had a braver name.

They called her, Donna Bella di Braganza,  
Castilian Queen of the Equestrian World.

I spelled it out upon the rainbow bills

The clown, who wagged the tail of the pro-  
cession,

Was scattering from his donkey-cart.

I saw my Queen again . . .

My gypsy Queen!

My black-haired, black-eyed gypsy . . .

You, and your red-haired Queens!

I'd give a world of red-haired Guineveres,

To see those gypsy eyes again . . .

*(A pause.)*

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I smell the sawdust now . . . and oranges . . .

'Twas in the tent . . .

She'd doffed her robes and crown . . .

I knew her by the flashing of her eyes,

Tripping nimbly into the ring,

So brave in yellow silk, skin-fitting silk,

Yellow as dandelions,

And sprinkled all with spangles;

And yellow ribbons in her hair,

Her jet-black hair that hung about her shoulders.

I see her tripping now into the ring,

With flashing eyes and teeth,

Clean-limbed, and mettlesome as the coal-black mare,

Coal-black from mane to fetlocks,

That pawed and champed to greet her . . .

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

And there's naught bonnier than a bonnie  
mare . . .

She clapped its glossy neck:

It nuzzled her:

Then ere I knew,

She'd lighted on its flanks,

Nimble and springy as a thistle-down:

And they were racing round the ring to-  
gether,

She, standing tip-toe,

And with ne'er a rein,

A straw between her teeth,

Her flashing teeth . . .

And tilted chin . . .

And flashing eyes . . .

Her beautiful long hair, as black and silky,

As black and silky as the mare's long mane,

Was streaming out behind . . .

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And ribbons streaming . . .  
Spangles sparkling . . .  
Sawdust flying,  
Whips, a-cracking . . .  
Music, playing . . .  
And now, she sprang  
Through flaming hoops,  
And my heart, through the fire with her,  
And lighted on the steamy flanks:  
And on, and on,  
And round, and round the ring,  
Till I was dazzled dizzy,  
And out of breath, but watching her.  
And what, with crack of whips . . .  
Thudding thresh of hoofs . . .  
Smell of spirting sawdust . . .  
Crash of drums and trumpets . . .  
Flaming hoops of fire . . .

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

Flying hair . . .  
Yellow ribbons . . .  
Flashing teeth . . .  
And flashing eyes . . .  
My blood was mad, was mad for her,  
I wanted to be flying round,  
For ever flying round with her,  
For ever, and for ever . . .  
I wanted her  
As I have never wanted woman,  
Before or since . . .

*(A pause.)*

And yet, I've little doubt  
That she'd have been a poor hand with the  
    porridge,  
And poorer at the milking,  
Though she could manage horses;



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And, maybe, 'twas as well  
That I walked home that night with Susan.  
Within nine months, we'd wedded.  
There's naught amiss with Susan's porridge,  
And she could milk a stone.  
She's been a good and careful wife enough.  
She never spares herself . . . nor me.  
Though, I dare say, I'm even more a trial  
To her, than to myself.  
And, though I'm often harking back,  
And sometimes hanker . . .  
Somehow, I cannot see the Donna Bella,  
In yellow skin-tights, cleaning out the byre!  
And yet!

MICHAEL

I saw Queen Guinevere, again,  
Three years ago, upon Midsummer Eve.  
She sat upon a little hill, and sang:

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

And combed her long red hair, beside the  
lough—

Just sitting like a leveret in the sun

To sleek its fur—

And all about her, grey snipe darted, drum-  
ming.

She combed her long red hair

That tumbled down her shoulders,

Her long hair, red as bracken,

As bracken in October;

And with a gleam of wind in it,

A light of running water.

Her crown was in the heather, at her feet:

And, now and then, a snipe would perch  
upon it;

And with his long neb preen his gleaming  
feathers,

As if to mock the Queen,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Queen Guinevere, a-combing her long hair  
That tumbled over a gown of blue . . .  
As blue and shimmery as a mallard's neck . . .  
And with a light of running water:  
And, as she sang, 'twas like the curlew call-  
ing,  
And rippled through my heart like curlew  
calling,  
Like curlew calling in the month of April,  
And with a clear cool noise of running water.

I dropped upon my belly in the bracken:  
And lay and watched her, combing her red  
hair:  
And hearkened to her singing . . .  
And I was sorry, when she'd done, at last,  
And took her long red hair, and twisted it,  
And fixed it with a golden pin.

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

Though she'd but little need of crown,  
Whose hair was golden crown enough,  
She stooped to take her gold crown from the  
    heather,  
And set it on her brow:  
Then stood upright,  
Stood like a birch-tree in the wind,  
A silver birch-tree in the sunset wind  
That ripples through its leaves like running  
    water;  
The little snipe about her drumming . . .  
And then, I looked into her eyes,  
Looked into golden pools,  
Pools, golden 'neath October bracken . . .  
And into the heart of fire . . .

*(A pause.)*

A shrew's cold muzzle touched my hand,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Among the bracken, startling me . . .

And she was gone . . .

GEORGE

*(After a pause.)*

And so, the leveret bolted!

You never saw her more?

So all tales end . . .

At least the true tales told by life itself.

Though I . . . I saw my Queen again . . .

Yet . . . with a difference . . .

'Twas at the next fair after I was married.

I thought I'd like a glimpse of her once more:

Though I had much ado, persuading Susan:

She'd never been inside a circus;

And thought it sorry waste of silver.

But, once inside the tent,

She liked it well enough:

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

And gaped and grinned her money's worth.  
And I . . . I sat, and waited,  
And waited for my gypsy . . .  
And snuffed the smell of sawdust:  
While Susan giggled at the clown—  
A yellow-legged old corncrake—  
And nudged me with her elbow;  
And asked me if I'd ever heard the like.  
But, I'd no ears nor eyes  
For any save my gypsy . . .  
And she . . . she never came.  
Another woman rode the coal-black mare—  
A red-haired jumping-jenny—  
And there was cracking whips . . .  
And sawdust flying . . .  
Drums and trumpets . . .  
Flaming hoops . . .  
And all the razzle-dazzle . . .

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

But not my black-eyed gypsy.  
And I sat, waiting still, when all was over,  
Until the tent was empty . . .  
Sat waiting for the Donna Bella . . .  
Till Susan tugged me by the jacket,  
And asked if I'd sit gaping there all night.  
She got me out, at last.  
And then . . . I met her . . .  
Met her, face to face,  
My gypsy Queen!  
But, oh! . . . how changed . . .  
Except her eyes . . .  
I knew her by her eyes:  
For they still flashed and sparkled,  
Though she was bent and hunched,  
And hobbled with a crutch.  
She'd had a tumble, since I'd seen her flying  
Around the ring, as light as thistle-down.

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

She clutched me with a skinny hand,  
Wanting to tell my fortune:  
But Susan wouldn't let her:  
She said, a married man had got his fortune;  
So needn't waste his earnings.  
The gypsy bit the straw between her teeth,  
Her flashing teeth;  
And, tilting her proud chin,  
She laughed at that, with merry eyes  
Twinkling 'neath her yellow kerchief—  
Dandelion yellow—  
Bound about her jet-black hair,  
The hair that I'd seen flying free . . .  
And when she laughed,  
And looked into my eyes . . .  
The heather was afire . . .  
I could have caught her to me,  
There and then . . .



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Whipped her up, and run with her  
To the world's end, and over . . .  
But, Susan . . . dragging on my arm . . .  
Ay! broken as she was,  
And hunched and hobbling,  
I would have wedded her outright,  
Had it not been for Susan . . .  
I lost her in the crowd . . .  
And never saw her more . . .

*(Pause.)*

And so, went home to decent porridge:  
And 'twas as well, maybe.  
A man must have his meat, if he's to work,  
And victuals count for much.  
And Susan's ever been a careful wife,  
And had no easy time of it.

*(Pause.)*

---

THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

But, love's a queer thing, Michael.

It comes to you . . . like that!

*(Striking his hands together.)*

I've known a man walk seven miles each night

To see a woman's shadow on the blind.

And, in the end,

It's one, and one alone, that holds you,

Be 't Donna Bella, Guinevere, or Peggy.

*(Pause.)*

But you . . . you never saw your carrotty

Queen,

Combing her long red hair again, I'll warrant.

MICHAEL

*(Slowly, as in a trance.)*

I saw her once, upon Midsummer Eve,

Six years ago . . .

---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I saw her, twice, upon Midsummer Eve,  
Three years ago . . .  
I'll see her thrice . . .

GEORGE

And, it's Midsummer Eve!

MICHAEL

*(Listening.)*

And nigh the hour . . .  
And hark, the snipe a-drumming!

GEORGE

You cannot think . . .  
It's all a pack of lies . . .  
Or else, you're daft, clean daft!  
Your eyes are queer and wild. . . .  
You do not see her now?

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

No! No! I thought not!  
It's all stuff and nonsense,  
Your silly tale about a red-haired Queen,  
Who's been dead dust a thousand years, or  
more.

MICHAEL

*(Leaping to his feet.)*

She's coming . . . coming now . . .

GEORGE

*(Leaping up, too, and gripping Michael's arm.)*

No! No!

You're crazy, surely . . .

Yet . . . queer things happen on the fells, at  
times . . .

And on Midsummer Eve . . .

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

MICHAEL

*(Listening more intently.)*

She's drawing slowly nearer . . .

I hear her silks a-rustling through the  
grass . . .

GEORGE

*(Listening too.)*

I seem to hear . . .

What are you gaping at?

MICHAEL

*(Looking up.)*

The Queen! The Queen!

*(They both stand, spellbound, gazing at a woman standing on the crest of a boulder, burning like a golden flame in the last rays of the setting sun. Presently, looking down, and seeing them, she laughs.)*

---

## THE QUEEN'S CRAGS

---

GEORGE

*(Shaking himself, while Michael still stands, spell-bound.)*

It's Peggy Haliburton, after all!

*(To Peggy.)*

Why, Michael said: 'twas Arthur's Queen.

He called her some outlandish name;

And said, she'd long red foxy hair,

And eyes like pools;

And sang just like the curlew.

But he'll be telling you himself:

For, all along, I knew 'twas you he meant.

Men's tongues wag madly on Midsummer

Eve:

And I've been talking, too,

A pack of nonsense,

As Michael, here, could tell you,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

If he'd not too much sense to heed  
An old man's witless blathering.  
Well, I had best be going;  
And getting home to Susan.  
She doesn't hold with owls, and such like.

*1912*

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

*Bloodybush Edge is a remote spot on the borderline between England and Scotland, marked by a dumpy obelisk, on which is inscribed an old scale of tolls. A rough sandy road runs down across the dark moors, into England on the one hand, and into Scotland on the other. It is a fine, starry night in early September. DAFT DICK, a fantastic figure, in appearance half-gamekeeper, half-tramp (dressed as he is in cast-off clothes of country-gentlemen) swings up the road from the Scottish side, singing.*

“Now Liddisdale has ridden a raid;  
But I wat they better hae stayed at hame;  
For Michael o’ Winfield, he lies dead;  
And Jock o’ the Side is prisoner ta’en.”

*He stands for a moment, looking across the fells, which are very dark, in spite of the starry sky; then flings himself down in the heather, with his back to the obelisk, and lights his pipe. Pres-*



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

*ently, he sees a dark figure, stumbling with uncertain steps across the boggy moor; and watches it keenly as it approaches, until it reaches the road, when he sees that it is a strange man, evidently a tramp.*

TRAMP

A track, at last, thank God!

DICK

Ay, there be whiles  
When beaten tracks are welcome.

TRAMP

Who the . . . Oh!  
I didn't count on having company  
Again in this world; and when I heard a  
voice  
I thought it must be another ghost. It's  
queer

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

Hearing a voice bleat when you haven't  
heard

A mortal voice for ages. I've not changed  
A word with a soul since noon; and when you  
spoke

It gave me quite a turn. A feather, Lord!  
But it wouldn't take the shadow of a feather  
To knock me over. I'm in such a stickle,  
Dead-beat, and fit to drop. To drop! I've  
dropped

A hundred times already, humpty-dumpty!  
Why, I've been tumbling in and out black  
holes,

Since sunset, on that god-forsaken moor,  
Half-crazed with fear of . . . Ah, you've got  
a light:

And I've been tramping all the livelong  
day

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

With a pipeful of comfort in my waistcoat-  
pocket;

And would have swopt the frizzling sun it-  
self;

For a match to kindle it. Thanks, mate,  
that's better.

And now, what was it you were saying, Old  
Cock,

When I mistook you then for Hamlet's  
father?

Lord! if you'd seen him at the "Elephant,"  
In queer, blue sheeny armour, you'd have  
shivered.

"I am thy father's spirit," he says, like that,  
Down in his boots. But you were saying——

DICK

There are times  
When beaten tracks are welcome.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

TRAMP

True for you:

And truer by a score of bumps, for me.

My neck's been broken half-a-dozen times:

My body's just an aching bag of bones.

I'm one big bruise from top to toe, as though

I'd played in the Cup Final, as the ball.

And mud, I'm mud to the eyes, and over,  
carrying

Half of the country that I've passed through  
on me.

My best suit, too! And I was always faddy  
About my clothes. My mother used to call  
me

Finicky Fred. If she could see me now!

I couldn't count the times that I've pitched  
headlong

Into black bog.

---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

DICK

Ay, there are clarty bits  
In Foulmire Moss. But what set you strav-  
aging  
Among the peat-hags at this time of night?  
Unless you know the tracks by heart. . . .

TRAMP

I know

The Old Kent Road by heart.

DICK

The Old Kent Road?

TRAMP

London, S. E. You've heard of London,  
likely?

DICK

Ay! Ay! I've heard. . . .

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

TRAMP

Well, mate, I've walked from London.

DICK

You've walked from London, here?

TRAMP

Well, not to-day.

It must be nigh three hundred mile, I reckon.

Just five weeks, yesterday, since I set out:

But, as you say, I've walked from London, here:

Though where "here" is the devil only knows!

What is "here" called, if it has any name

But Back o' Beyond, or World's End, eh?

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

DICK

You're sitting  
On Bloodybush Edge this moment.

TRAMP

To think of that!  
Bloodybush Edge! And that's what I have  
come to;  
While all my friends, the men and women I  
know,  
Are strolling up and down the Old Kent  
Road,  
Chattering and laughing by the lighted  
stalls  
And the barrows of bananas and oranges;  
Or sitting snugly in bars; and here am I,  
On Bloodybush Edge, talking to Hamlet's  
father.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

DICK

My name's Dick Dodd.

TRAMP

Well, no offence, Old Cock!

And Hamlet's father was a gentleman,  
A king of ghosts; and Lord! but he could  
groan.

My name's . . . Jack Smith: and Jack  
would give a sovereign,  
A sovereign down, if he could borrow it,  
And drinks all around, and here's to you, and  
you!

Just to be sitting in The Seven Stars,  
And listening to the jabber, just to snuff  
A whiff of the smoke and spirit. Seven Stars!  
I'm lodging under stars enough to-night:  
Seven times seven hundred. . . .



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

DICK

Often I have tried  
To count them, lying here upon my back:  
But they're too many for me. Just when  
you think  
You've reckoned all between two sprigs of  
heather,  
One tumbles from its place, or else a hundred  
Spring out of nowhere. If you only stare  
Hard at the darkest patch, for long enough  
You'll see that it's all alive with little stars;  
And there isn't any dark at all.

TRAMP

No dark!  
If you'd been tumbling into those black  
holes,  
You'd not think overmuch of these same  
stars.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

I couldn't see my hand before me. Stars!  
Give me the lamps along the Old Kent Road:  
And I'm content to leave the stars to you.  
They're well enough; but hung a trifle high  
For walking with clean boots. Now a lamp  
or so . . .

DICK

If it's so fine and brave, the Old Kent Road,  
How is it you came to leave it?

TRAMP

I'd my reasons.

DICK

Reasons! Queer reasons surely to set you  
trapesing  
Over Foulmire in the dark: though I could  
travel

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

The fells from here to Cheviot, blindfold. Ay!  
And never come a cropper.

TRAMP

'Twas my luck,  
My lovely luck, and naught to do with rea-  
sons—

My gaudy luck, and the devilish dust and heat,  
And hell's own thirst that drove me; and too  
snug

A bed among the heather. Oversleeping,  
That's always played the mischief with  
me. Once

I slept till three in the morning, and . . .

DICK

Till three?

You're an early bird, if you call that over-  
sleeping.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

Folk hereabouts are mostly astir by three:  
But, city-folk, I thought. . . .

TRAMP

I'm on the night-shift.  
I sleep by day, for the most part, like a cat.  
That's why, though dog-tired now, I couldn't  
sleep  
A wink though you paid me gold down.

DICK

Night-shift, you!  
And what may your job be? Cat's night-  
shift, likely,  
As well as day's sleep!

TRAMP

Now, look here, Old Cock,  
There's just one little thing that we could  
teach you

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Down London way. Why, even babes in  
London

Know better than to ask too many questions.  
You ask no questions, and you'll hear no  
lies,

Is the first lesson that's hammered into them.  
No London gentleman asks questions. Lord!  
If you went "What's-your-job?"-ing down  
our way

You'd soon be smelling someone's fist I  
reckon;

Or tripping over somebody in the dark  
Upon the stairs: and with a broken neck,  
Be left, still asking questions in your coffin,  
Till the worms had satisfied you. Not that I  
Have anything to hide, myself. I'm only  
Advising you for your own good. But, Old  
Chap,

---

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

We were talking of something else . . . that  
hell-hot road

I'd pegged along it through the blazing dust  
From Bellingham, till I could peg no more,  
My mouth was just a limekiln; and each  
foot

One bleeding blister. A kipper on the grid,  
That's what I was on the road. And the  
heather looked

So cool and cosy, I left the road for a bit;  
And coming on a patch of wet green moss,  
I took my boots off; and it was so champion  
To feel cold water squelching between my  
toes,

I paddled on like a child, till I came to a  
clump

Of heather in full bloom, just reeking honey;  
And curled up in it, and dropt sound asleep;

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And, when I wakened, it was dark, pitch-  
dark,

For all your stars. The sky was light enough,  
Had I been travelling that way. But, for the  
road,

I hadn't a notion of its whereabouts.

A blessed babe-in-the-woods I was, clean  
lost,

And fit to cry for my mammy. Babes-in-  
the-wood!

But there were two of them, for company,  
And only one of me, by my lone self.

However, I said to myself: You've got to  
spend

A night in the heather. Well, you've known  
worse beds,

And worse bed-fellows than a sheep or so—  
Trying to make believe I wasn't frightened.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

And then, somehow, I couldn't, God knows  
why!

But I was scared: the loneliness, and all;  
The quietness, and the queer creepy noises;  
And something that I couldn't put a name  
to,

A kind of feeling in my marrow bones,  
As though the great black hills against the  
sky

Had come alive about me in the night;  
And they were watching me; as though I  
stood

Naked, in a big room, with blind men sitting,  
Unseen, all round me, in the quiet darkness,  
That was not dark to them. And all the  
stars

Were eyeing me; and whisperings in the  
heather



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Were like cold water trickling down my spine:  
And when I heard a cough. . . .

DICK

A coughing sheep.

TRAMP

May be: but 'twas a coughing ghost to me.  
I've never yet set eyes on a ghost, unless  
    . . . (*looking askance at DICK*)  
Though I've often felt them near me. Once,  
    when I . . .  
But, Lord, I'm talking, talking . . .

DICK

I've seen ghosts,  
A hundred times. The ghosts of reivers ride  
The fells at night; and you'd have ghosts in  
    plenty

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

About you, lad, though you were blind to  
them.

But, why d' you fear them? There's no harm  
in ghosts.

Even should they ride over you, it's only  
Like a cold wind blowing through you. The  
other night,

As I came down by Girsonsfield, the ghost  
Of Percy Reed, with neither hands nor  
feet,

Rode clean through me; the false Halls, and  
the Croziers

Hard on his heels, though I kept clear of  
them;

And often I've heard him, cracking his  
hunting-crop,

On a winter's night, when the winds were in  
full cry;

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And heard the yelp of the pack, and the  
horn's halloo,

Over the howl of the storm, or caught at  
dawn

A glimpse of the tails of his green hunting-  
jacket.

Whenever you shudder, or break in a cold  
sweat,

Not knowing why, folk say that someone's  
stepping

Over your grave; but that's all stuff and  
nonsense.

It's only some poor ghost that's walking  
through you.

TRAMP

Well, ghosts or sheep, I'd had my fill of  
them;

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

Went all to pieces, took to my heels and  
ran;

And hadn't run three yards, when I pitched  
headlong.

That was the first. Since then, I've felt the  
bottom

Of every hole, five hundred to my reckon-  
ing,

From there to here.

DICK

You've covered some rough ground.  
But you have doubled back upon your tracks  
If you were making North.

TRAMP

Ay: I was making  
For Scotland. I'd a notion . . .

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

DICK

Scotland lies

Under your left heel, though your right's in  
England.

TRAMP

To think of that! Well, I can't feel much  
difference

Twixt one and the other. Perhaps, if I'd  
my boots off . . .

But, Hamlet's father, isn't it a king's bed  
We're lying on, and sprawling over two coun-  
tries!

And yet, I'd rather be in Millicent Place,  
London, S. E., and sleeping three in a bed.  
This room's too big for me, too wide and  
windy;

The bed, too broad, and not what I call snug:  
The ceiling, far too high, and full of eyes.

---

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

I hate the loneliness. I like to feel  
There are houses, packed with people, all  
about me  
For miles on miles: I'm fond of company;  
I'm only really happy in a throng,  
Crowds jostling thick and hot about me. Here  
I feel, somehow, as if I were walking naked  
Among the hills, the last man left alive.  
I haven't so much as set eyes on a house,  
Not since I left that blistering road.

DICK

The nearest

Is three miles off, or more.

TRAMP

Well, country-people  
Should be good neighbours, and quiet; but,  
for me,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I'd rather be packed like herrings in a barrel.

I hate the loneliness: it makes me think. . .

I'm fond of company; too fond at times.

If I hadn't been so fond of company

A while back, I'd have hardly been lying  
now

On Bloodybush Edge, talking of ghosts at  
midnight,

When I might be . . . but it won't bear  
thinking on.

Yet, even with you beside me, Bloodybush  
Edge

Is a size too big in beds—leaves too much  
room

For ghosts, to suit my fancy. Three in a  
bed,

And you sleep sound.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

DICK

And why should you fear ghosts,  
When, one fine night, you'll be a ghost your-  
self?

How soon, who knows! Why, even at this  
moment,

If you had broken your neck among the  
moss-hags

You'd be your own ghost sitting there, not  
you.

If you hadn't been so muddy, and so fright-  
ened . . .

Nay; but I've seen too many ghosts in my  
time

For you to take me in. Ghosts often lean  
Over me, when I'm fishing in the moonlight.  
They're keen, are ghosts. I sometimes feel  
their breath



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Upon my neck, when I am guddling trout;  
Or the clutch of their clammy fingers on my  
wrist

When I am spearing salmon, lest I miss.  
And always at the burning of the water  
You'll see them lurking in the shadows, be-  
yond

The flare and the smoke of the torches, in  
the night,

Eager as boys to join in the sport; and at  
times,

When they have pressed too near, and a  
torch has flared,

I've seen the live flame running through their  
bodies.

But oftenest they appear to me when alone  
I'm fishing like a heron; and last night  
As I stooped over Deadwater, I felt . . .

---

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

### TRAMP

And you're an honest man to be asking ques-  
tions

Of gentlemen on tour! So, you're a poacher,  
A common poacher: though it must be rare  
sport,

I've often fancied . . .

### DICK

To creep up to a pool  
Where a big bull-trout lies beneath a boulder  
With nose against the stream, his tail scarce  
flicking;

To creep up quiet and without a shadow,  
And lie upon your belly in the gravel;  
And slide your hands as noiseless as an otter  
Into the water, icy-cold and aching,  
And tickle, tickle, till you have him fuddled;

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Then lift him, cold and slithery, from the  
burn,  
A quivering bit of silver in the moonlight . . .

### TRAMP

Ay, that must be rare sport; but, for myself,  
I'd rather manage without the help of ghosts.  
Once, I remember, I was bending down—  
'Twas in an empty house . . . I'd cut my  
thumb,  
The window jamming somehow, a nasty cut:  
The mark's still there . . . (not that! nay,  
that's the place  
I was bitten by a friend) and as I fumbled  
With a damned tricky lock, some Yankee patent,  
I felt a ghost was standing close behind me,

---

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

And dared not stir, or squint over my shoulder:

But crouched there, moving neither hand nor foot,

Till I was just a solid ache of terror,

And could have squealed aloud with the numb cramp,

And pins and needles in my arms and legs.

And then at last, when I was almost dropping,

I lost my head, took to my heels, and bolted Headfirst down stairs, and through the broken window,

Leaving my kit and the swag, without a thought:

And never coming to my senses, till

I saw a bullseye glimmering down the lane.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And then I found my brow was bleeding,  
too—

At first I thought 'twas sweat—a three-inch  
cut,

Clean to the bone. I had to have it stitched.  
I told the doctor that I'd put my head  
Through a window in the dark, but not a word  
About my body following it. The doctor,  
He was a gentleman, and asked no questions.  
A civil chap: he'd stitched my scalp before  
Once, when the heel of a lady's slipper . . .

DICK

So you  
Are a common poacher, too; although you  
take

Only dead silver and gold. Still it must be  
A risky business, burgling, when the folk . . .

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

TRAMP

Risk! ay, there's risk! That's where the fun  
comes in;

To steal into a house, with people sleeping  
So warm and snug and innocent overhead;  
To hear them snoring as you pass their doors  
With all they're dreaming of stowed in your  
pockets;

To tiptoe from the attic to the basement,  
With a chance that you may find on any  
landing

A door flung open, and a man to tackle.

It's only empty houses I'm afraid of.

I've more than once looked up a pistol's  
snout,

And never turned a hair . . . though once I  
heard

A telephone-bell ring in an empty house—

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And I can hear the damned thing tinkling  
yet . . .

I'm all in a cold sweat just thinking of it.

It tinkled, tinkled . . . Risk! Why man  
alive,

Life's all a risky business, till you're dead.

There's no risk then . . . unless . . . I never  
feared

A living man, sleeping or waking, yet.

But ghosts, well, ghosts are different some-  
how. There's

A world of difference between men and  
ghosts.

Let's think no more of ghosts—but lighted  
streets,

And crowds, and women; though it's my be-  
lief

There's not a woman in all this country-side.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

DICK

There's womenfolk, and plenty. And they  
are kind,

The womenfolk, to me. Daft Dick is ever  
A favourite with the womenfolk. His belly  
Would oft go empty, were it not for them.

TRAMP

You call those women, gawky, rawboned  
creatures,

Thin-lipped, hard-jawed, cold-eyed! I like  
fat women.

If you could walk just now down the Old  
Kent Road,

And see the plump young girls in furs and  
feathers,

With saucy black eyes, sparkling in the gas-  
light;



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And looking at you, munching oranges,  
Or whispering to each other with shrill  
giggles

As you go by, and nudging one another;  
Or standing with a soldier eating winkles,  
Grimacing with the vinegar and pepper,  
Then laughing so merrily you almost wish  
You were a red-coat, too! And the fat old  
mothers,

Too old for feathers and follies, with their  
tight

Nigh-bursting bodices, and their double chins,  
They're homely, motherly and comfortable,  
And do a man's eyes good. There's not a  
sight

In all the world that's half as rare to see  
As a fat old wife with jellied cels and  
porter.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

Ay, women should be plump . . . though  
Ellen Ann

Was neither old nor fat, when she and I  
Were walking out together, and she'd red  
hair,

As red as blazes, and a peaked white face.

But 'twas her eyes, her eyes that always  
laughed,

And the merry way she had with her . . .

But, Lord,

I'm talking! Only mention petticoats,

And I'm the boy to talk till dooms-  
day. Women!

If it hadn't been for a petticoat, this moment  
I might be drinking my own health in the  
bar

Of The Seven Stars or The World Turned  
Upside Down,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Instead of . . . Well, Old Cock, it's good to  
have

Someone to talk to, after such a day.

You cannot get much further with a sheep;  
And I met none but sheep, and they all scut-  
tled,

Not even stopping to pass the time of  
day,

And the birds, well, they'd enough to say,  
and more,

When I was running away from myself in  
the dark,

With their "Go back! Go back!"

DICK

You'd scared the grouse.  
They talk like Christians. Often in the  
dawn . . .

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

TRAMP

Bloodybush Edge! But why the Bloody-  
bush?

I see no bush. . . .

DICK

Some fight in the old days, likely,  
In the days when men were men . . .

TRAMP

I little thought,  
When I set out from London on my travels,  
That I was making straight for Bloodybush  
Edge.

I had my reasons, but, reason or none, it's  
certain

That I'd have turned up here, someday or  
other:

For I must travel. I've the itching foot.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I talk of London, when I'm well out of it  
By a hundred miles or so; but, when I'm in  
it,

There always comes a time when I couldn't  
stay

A moment longer, not for love or money:  
Though in the end it always has me back.

I cannot rest. There's something in my  
bones—

They'll need to screw the lid down with  
brass screws

To keep them in my coffin. When I'm dead,  
If I don't walk, I'll be surprised, I . . .

Lord,

We're on to ghosts again! But I'm the sort  
That's always hankering to be elsewhere,  
Wherever I am. Some men can stick to a  
job

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

As though they liked it. I'm not made that  
way.

I couldn't heave the same pick two days  
running.

I've tried it: and I know. I must have  
change.

It's in my blood. And work, why work's for  
fools.

DICK

Ay, fools indeed: and yet they seem con-  
tent.

Content! why my old uncle, Richard Dodd,  
He worked till he was naught but skin and  
bone,

And rheumatism: and when the doctor told  
him:

“You must give up. It's no use; you're past  
work.”

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

“Past work,” he says, “past work, like an  
old horse:

“They shoot old nags, when they are past  
their work.

“Doctor,” he says, “I’ll give you five pound  
down

“To take that gun, and shoot me like a  
nag.”

The doctor only laughed, and answered,  
“Nay.

“An old nag’s carcass is worth money,  
Richard:

“But yours, why, who’d give anything for  
yours!”

They call me daft—Daft Dick. It pleases  
them.

But I have never been daft enough to work.  
I never did a hand’s turn in my life:

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

And won't, while there are trout-streams  
left, and women.

And I am a traveller, too, I cannot rest.

The wind's in my bones, I think, and like  
the wind,

I'm here, to-night; to-morrow, Lord knows  
where!

TRAMP

London, perhaps, or well upon the road  
there,

Since I'm on Bloodybush Edge.

DICK

Nay, never London.

I cannot thole the towns. They stifle me.

I spent a black day in Newcastle, once.

Never again! I cannot abide the crowds.

I must be by myself. I must have air:



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

I must have room to breathe, and elbow-  
room,

Wide spaces round me, winds and running  
water.

I know the singing-note of every burn  
'Twixt here and High Cup Nick, by Appleby.  
And birds and beasts, I must have them  
about me.

Rabbits and hares, weasels and stoats and  
adders,

Plover and grouse, partridge and snipe and  
curlew,

Red-shank and heron. I think that towns  
would choke me;

And I'd go blind shut in by the tall houses,  
With never a far sight to stretch my eyes.

I must have hills, and hills beyond. And  
beds—

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

I never held with beds and stuffiness.  
I'm seldom at my ease beneath a roof:  
The rafters all seem crushing on my head,  
A dead weight. Though I sleep in barns in  
    Winter,  
I'm never at home except beneath the stars.  
I've seen enough of towns; and as for the  
    women,  
Fat blowsy sluts and slatterns . . .

TRAMP

Easy, Old Cock!  
“What's one man's meat . . .” as the saying  
    is; and so,  
Each man to his own world, and his own  
    women.

*(They sit for awhile smoking in silence. Then DAFT  
DICK begins singing softly to himself again.)*

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

DICK

(*Singing*) “Their horses were the wrong way<sup>s</sup>  
shod,

And Hobbie has mounted his grey sae fine,  
Wat on his old horse, Jock on his bay;  
And on they rode for the waters of Tyne.

“And when they came to Chollerton Ford,  
They lighted down by the light o’ the moon;  
And a tree they cut with nogs on each side,  
To climb up the wa’ of Newcastle toun.”

TRAMP

What’s that you’re singing, matey?

DICK

“Jock o’ the Side.”

A ballad of the days when men were men,

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

And sheep, were sheep, and not all mixer-  
maxter.

Thon were brave days, or brave nights,  
rather, thon!

Brave nights, when Liddisdale was Liddis-  
dale,

And Tynedale, Tynedale, not all hand-in-  
glove,

And hanky-panky, and naught but market-  
haggling

Twixt men whose fathers' swords were the  
bargainers!

That was a man's work, riding out, hot-trod,  
Over the hills to lift a herd of cattle,

And leave behind a blazing byre, or to steal  
Your neighbour's sheep, while he lay drunk  
and snoring—

A man's work, ever bringing a man's wages,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

The fight to the death, or life won at the  
sword's point.

God! those were nights: the heather and sky  
alow

With the light of burning peel-towers, and  
the wind

Ringing with slogans, as the dalesmen met,  
Over the singing of the swords:

“An Armstrong! An Armstrong!”

“A Milburne! A Milburne!”

“An Elliott! An Elliott!”

“A Robson! A Robson!”

“A Charlton! A Charlton!”

“A Fenwick! A Fenwick!”

“Fy, Tynedale, to it!”

“Jethert's here! Jethert's here!”

“Tarset and Tarretburn!

“Hardy and heatherbred!

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

“Yet! Yet!”

Man, did you ever hear the story told  
Of Barty Milburne, Barty of the Comb,  
Down Tarsset way? and how he waked one  
morning

To find that overnight some Scottish reiver  
Had lifted the pick of his flock: and how hot-  
foot

He was up the Blackburn, summoning Cor-  
bet Jock:

And how the two set out to track the thieves  
By Emblehope, Berrymoor Edge and Black-  
man’s Law,

By Blakehope Nick, and under Oh Me Edge,  
And over Girdle Fell to Chattlehope Spout,  
And so to Carter Bar; but lost the trail  
Somewhere about the Reidswire: and how,  
being loth

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

To go home empty-handed, they just lifted  
The best sheep grazing on the Scottish side,  
As fair exchange: and turned their faces  
home.

By this, snow had set in: and 'twas sore  
work

Driving the wethers against it over the fell;  
When, finding they were followed in their  
turn

By the laird of Leatham and his son, they  
laughed,

And waited for the Scots by Chattlehope  
Spout

Above Catcleugh: and in the snow they  
fought,

Till Corbet Jock and one of the Scots were  
killed,

And Barty himself sore wounded in the thigh;

---

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

When the other Scot, thinking him good as  
dead,

Sprang on him, as he stooped, with a whick-  
ering laugh:

And Barty, with ~~one~~ clean, back-handed  
blow,

Struck off his head, and, as they tell the tale,  
“Garred it spang like an onion along the  
heather.”

Then, picking up the body of Corbet Jock,  
He slung it over his shoulder; and carried his  
mate

With wounded thigh, and driving the wethers  
before him

Through blinding snow, across the boggy  
fells

To the Blackburn, though his boot was filled  
with blood.



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Or the other tale, how one of the Robson  
lads

Stole a Scot's ewes: and when he'd got them  
home,

And had mixed them with his own, found  
out, too late,

They'd got the scab: and how he went  
straight back

With a stout hempen rope to the Scot's  
house

And hanged him from his own rooftree by  
the neck

Till he was dead, to teach the rascal a lesson,  
Or so he said, that when a gentleman called  
For sheep the next time, he'd think twice  
about it

Before he tried to palm off scabbit ewes.

Poachers and housebreakers and bargainers!

---

## BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

Those men were men: and lived and died  
like men;

Taking their own road—asking no man's  
leave;

Doing and speaking outright, hot and clean,  
The thing that burned in them, and paying  
the price.

And those same gawky, rawboned women  
mothered

Such sons as these; and still do, nowadays—  
For hunting foxes, and for market-haggling!  
You fear no living man! A glinting bullseye  
Down a dark lane would not have set them  
scuttling.

They didn't dread the mosshags in the dark.  
And seemingly they'd little fear of ghosts,  
Being themselves so free in making ghosts.  
Ghosts! why the night is all alive with ghosts,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Ghosts of dead raiders, and dead cattle-  
lifters;

Poor, headless ghosts; and ghosts with  
broken necks . . .

See that chap, yonder, with the bleeding thigh,  
On a grey gelding, making for Huckle-  
winter—

A horse-thief, sure . . . And the ghostly  
stallions whinney

As the ghostly reivers drive their flocks and  
herds . . .

*(Listening.)*

They are quiet now: but I've often heard the  
patter

Of sheep, or the trot-trot of the frightened  
stirks

Down this same road . . .

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

TRAMP

Stop man! You'll drive me crazy!

Let's talk no more of ghosts! I want to sleep:  
I'm dog-tired . . . but I'll never sleep to-  
night.

What's that . . . I thought I heard . . .  
I'm all a-tremble.

My very blood stops, listening, in my veins.  
I'm all to fiddlestrings . . . Let's talk of  
London,

And lights, and crowds, and women. Once I  
met

A chap in the bar of The World Turned Up-  
side Down,

With three blue snakes tattooed around his  
wrist:

A joker, he was; and what he didn't know  
Of women the world over you could shove

---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Between the nail and the quick, and never  
feel it—

He told me that in Valparaiso once  
A half-breed wench that he . . . but, Lord,  
what's that!

*(A low distant sound of trotting drawing quickly  
nearer.)*

I thought I heard . . . Do you hear nothing?

DICK

Naught.

TRAMP

I'm all on edge: I could have sworn I heard—  
Where was I? Well, as I was saying . . .  
God!

Can you hear nothing now? Trot-trot!  
Trot-trot!

I must be going crazed, or you're stone deaf.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

DICK

Nay, I'm none deaf.

TRAMP

It's coming nearer, nearer . . .  
Trot-trot! trot-trot! Man, tell me that you  
hear it,  
For God's sake, or I'll go mad!

DICK

No two men ever  
May hear or see them, together, at one time.

TRAMP

Hear what? See what? Speak, man, if you've  
a tongue!

DICK

The ghostly stirks.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

TRAMP

*(Starting up.)*

The ghostly stirks! Trot-trot!

Trot-trot! They're almost on us. Look  
you! there!

Along the road there, black against the  
sky.

They're charging down with eyes ablaze . . .

O Christ . . .

*(He takes to his heels, running lamely down the road on the Scottish side, as a herd of frightened young stirks gallops down the road from the English side. They pass Dick, who watches them, placidly smoking, until they are by, when, taking his pipe from his mouth, he gives a blood-curdling whoop, which sends them scampering more wildly after the tramp. Presently the cattle-drover, panting and limping half-a-mile behind his herd, comes down the road. Seeing DICK, he stops.)*

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

DROVER

Have any beasts come by? Lord, what a  
dance

They've led me, since we quitted Belling-  
ham!

I've chased them over half the countryside!

DICK

Aye: they were making straight for Din-  
labyre.

DROVER

Then I can rest. They cannot go far wrong  
now.

We're for Saughtree; and I'm fair hattered,  
and they

Can't have the spunk left in them to stray  
far.

They'll be all right.



---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

DICK

Ay! and your brother's with them.

DROVER

Brother? I have no brother . . .

DICK

Well, he and you  
Are as like as peas—a pair of gallows-birds.  
And he was driving them, and walloping  
them . . .

DROVER

*(Starting to run.)*

Good God! Just wait till I catch up with him!

DICK

*(Calling after him.)*

It will take you all your time and more, to  
catch him.

---

BLOODYBUSH EDGE

---

*(To himself.)*

Now, I can sleep in peace, without bed-  
fellows.

Two in a bed is one too many for me—  
And such a clatter-jaw!

*1913*

## HOOPS

SCENE: *The big tent-stable of a travelling circus.*

*On the ground near the entrance, GENTLEMAN JOHN, stable-man and general odd-job man, lies smoking beside MERRY ANDREW, the clown. GENTLEMAN JOHN is a little hunched man with a sensitive face and dreamy eyes. MERRY ANDREW, who is resting between the afternoon and evening performances, with his clown's hat lying beside him, wears a crimson wig, and a baggy suit of orange-coloured cotton, patterned with purple cats. His face is chalked dead white and painted with a set grin, so that it is impossible to see what manner of man he is. In the background are camels and elephants feeding, dimly visible in the steamy dusk of the tent.*

GENTLEMAN JOHN

And then consider camels: only think  
Of camels long enough, and you'd go mad—

---

## HOOPS

---

With all their humps and lumps; their  
knobbly knees,

Splay feet and straddle legs; their sagging  
necks,

Flat flanks, and scraggy tails, and monstrous  
teeth.

I've not forgotten the first fiend I met,

'Twas in a lane in Smyrna, just a ditch

Between the shuttered houses, and so nar-  
row

The brute's bulk blocked the road; the huge,  
green stack

Of dewy fodder that it slouched beneath

Brushing the yellow walls on either hand,

And shutting out the strip of burning blue:

And I'd to face that vicious, bobbing head

With evil eyes, slack lips, and nightmare  
teeth,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And duck beneath the snaky, squirming  
neck,

Pranked with its silly string of bright blue  
beads,

That seemed to wriggle every way at once,  
As though it were a hydra. Allah's beard!

But I was scared and nearly turned and ran:  
I felt that muzzle take me by the scruff  
And heard those murderous teeth crunching  
my spine,

Before I stooped—though I dodged safely  
under.

I've always been afraid of ugliness.

I'm such a toad myself, I hate all toads;

And the camel is the ugliest toad of all

To my mind: and it's just my devil's luck

I've come to this—to be a camel's lackey,

To fetch and carry for original sin,

---

## HOOPS

---

For sure enough, the camel's old evil incarnate.

Blue beads and amulets to ward off evil!

No eye's more evil than a camel's eye.

The elephant is quite a comely brute,

Compared with Satan camel,—trunk and all,

His floppy ears and his impertinent tail.

He's stolid, but, at least, a gentleman.

It doesn't hurt my pride to valet him,

And bring his shaving-water. He's a lord.

Only the bluest blood that has come down

Through generations from the mastodon

Could carry off that tail with dignity,

That tail and trunk. He cannot look absurd

For all the monkey tricks you put him  
through,

Your paper hoops and popguns. He just  
makes

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

His masters look ridiculous, when his pomp's  
Butchered to make a bumpkins' holiday.

He's dignity itself, and proper pride,  
That stands serenely in a circus-world  
Of mountebanks and monkeys. He has  
weight

Behind him: æons of primeval power  
Have shaped that pillared bulk; and he  
stands sure,

Solid, substantial on the world's foundations.  
And he has form, form that's too big a thing  
To be called beauty. Once long since, I  
thought

To be a poet, and shape words, and mould  
A poem like an elephant, huge, sublime,  
To front oblivion: and because I failed  
And all my rhymes were gawky, shambling  
camels,

---

## HOOPS

---

Or else obscene, blue-buttocked apes, I'm  
doomed

To fetch and carry for the things I've made,  
Till one of them crunches my back-bone  
with his teeth,

Or knocks my wind out with a forthright  
kick

Clean in the midriff; crumpling up in death  
The hunched and stunted body that was me,  
John, the apostle of the Perfect Form!

Jerusalem! I'm talking, like a book,  
As you would say: and a bad book at that,  
A maundering, kiss-mammy book—The  
Hunchback's End,

Or The Camel-Keeper's Reward—would be  
its title.

I froth and bubble like a new-broached cask.  
No wonder you look glum for all your grin.



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

What makes you mope? You've naught to  
growse about.

You've got no hump. Your body's brave  
and straight—

So shapely even that you can afford  
To trick it in fantastic shapelessness,  
Knowing that there's a clean-limbed man  
beneath

Preposterous pantaloons and purple cats.

I would have been a poet, if I could:

But better than shaping poems, 'twould  
have been

To have had a comely body and clean limbs  
Obedient to my bidding.

MERRY ANDREW

I missed a hoop

This afternoon.

---

## HOOPS

---

GENTLEMAN JOHN

You missed a hoop? You mean . . .

MERRY ANDREW

That I am done, used up, scrapped, on the  
shelf,

Out of the running,—only that, no more.

GENTLEMAN JOHN

Well, I've been missing hoops my whole life  
long;

Though, when I come to think of it, perhaps

There's little consolation to be chewed

From crumbs that I can offer.

MERRY ANDREW

I've not missed

A hoop since I was six. I'm forty-two.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

This is the first time that my body's failed  
me:

But 'twill not be the last. And . . .

### GENTLEMAN JOHN

Such is life!

You're going to say. You see I've got it pat,  
Your jaded wheeze. Lord, what a wit I'd  
make

If I'd a set grin painted on my face.  
And such is life, I'd say a hundred times,  
And each time set the world aroar afresh  
At my original humour. Missed a hoop!  
Why, man alive, you've naught to grumble  
at.

I've boggled every hoop since I was six.  
I'm fifty-five; and I've run round a ring  
Would make this potty circus seem a pinhole.

---

## HOOPS

---

I wasn't born to sawdust. I'd the world  
For circus . . .

MERRY ANDREW

It's no time for crowing now.  
I know a gentleman, and take on trust  
The silver spoon and all. My teeth were cut  
Upon a horseshoe: and I wasn't born  
To purple and fine linen—but to sawdust,  
To sawdust, as you say—brought up on  
sawdust.  
I've had to make my daily bread of sawdust:  
Ay, and my children's—children's, that's the  
rub,  
As Shakespeare says . . .

GENTLEMAN JOHN

Ah, there you go again!  
What a rare wit to set the ring aroar—

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

As Shakespeare says! Crowing? A gentleman?

Man, didn't you say you'd never missed a hoop?

It's only gentlemen who miss no hoops,  
Clean-livers, easy lords of life who take  
Each obstacle at a leap, who never fail.  
You are the gentleman.

MERRY ANDREW

Now don't you try  
Being funny at my expense; or you'll soon  
find

I'm not quite done for yet—not quite snuffed  
out.

There's still a spark of life. You may have  
words:

But I've a fist will be a match for them.

---

## HOOPS

---

Words slaver feebly from a broken jaw.  
I've always lived straight, as a man must do  
In my profession, if he'd keep in fettle:  
But I'm no gentleman, for I fail to see  
There's any sport in baiting a poor man  
Because he's losing grip at forty-two,  
And sees his livelihood slipping from his  
grasp—  
Ay, and his children's bread.

### GENTLEMAN JOHN

Why, man alive,  
Who's baiting you? This winded, broken  
cur,  
That limps through life, to bait a bull like  
you!  
You don't want pity, man? The beaten bull,  
Even when the dogs are tearing at his gullet,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Turns no eye up for pity. I, myself,  
Crippled and hunched and twisted as I am,  
Would make a brave fend to stand up to  
you

Until you swallowed your words, if you  
should slobber

Your pity over me. A bull! Nay, man,  
You're nothing but a bear with a sore head.  
A bee has stung you—you who've lived on  
honey.

Sawdust, forsooth! You've had the sweet of  
life:

You've munched the honeycomb till . . .

MERRY ANDREW

Ay: talk's cheap.  
But you've no children. You don't under-  
stand.

---

## HOOPS

---

GENTLEMAN JOHN

I have no children: I don't understand!

MERRY ANDREW

It's children make the difference.

GENTLEMAN JOHN

Man alive—

Alive and kicking, though you're shamming  
dead—

You've hit the truth at last. It's that, just  
that,

Makes all the difference. If you hadn't chil-  
dren,

I'd find it in my heart to pity you,

Granted you'd let me. I don't understand!

I've seen you stripped. I've seen your chil-  
dren stripped.



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

You've never seen me naked; but you can  
guess

The misstitched, gnarled, and crooked thing  
I am.

Now, do you understand? I may have words:  
But you; man, do you never burn with pride  
That you've begotten those six limber bodies,  
Firm flesh, and supple sinew, and lithe  
limb—

Six nimble lads, each like young Absalom,  
With red blood running lively in his veins,  
Bone of your bone, your very flesh and  
blood?

It's you don't understand: God, what I'd  
give

This moment to be you, just as you are,  
Preposterous pantaloons, and purple cats,  
And painted leer, and crimson curls, and all,

---

## HOOPS

---

To be you now, with only one missed hoop,  
If I'd six clean-limbed children of my loins,  
Born of the ecstasy of life within me,  
To keep it quick and valiant in the ring  
When I . . . but I . . . Man, man, you've  
missed a hoop:

But they'll take every hoop like blooded  
colts:

And 'twill be you in them that leaps through  
life,

And in their children, and their children's  
children.

God! doesn't it make you hold your breath  
to think

There'll always be an Andrew in the ring,  
The very spit and image of you stripped,  
While life's old circus lasts? And I . . . at  
least,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

There is no twisted thing of my begetting  
To keep my shame alive: and that's the most  
That I've to pride myself upon. But, God,  
I'm proud, ay, proud as Lucifer, of that.

Think what it means, with all the urge and  
sting,

When such a lust of life runs in the veins.

You, with your six sons, and your one missed  
hoop,

Put that thought in your pipe and smoke it.

Well,

And how d'you like the flavour? Something  
bitter?

And burns the tongue a trifle? That's the  
brand

That I must smoke while I've the breath to  
puff.

*(Pause.)*

---

## HOOPS

---

I've always worshipped the body, all my  
life—

The body, quick with the perfect health  
which is beauty,

Lively, lissom, alert, and taking its way  
Through the world with the easy gait of the  
early gods.

The only moments I've lived my life to the full  
And that live again in remembrance unfaded  
are those

When I've seen life compact in some perfect  
body,

The living God made manifest in man:

A diver in the Mediterranean, resting,

With sleeked black hair, and glistening salt-  
tanned skin,

Gripping the quivering gunwale with tense  
hands,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

His torso lifted out of the peacock sea,  
Like Neptune, carved in amber, come to  
life:

A stark Egyptian on the Nile's edge poised  
Like a bronze Osiris against the lush, rank  
green:

A fisherman dancing reels, on New Year's  
Eve,

In a hall of shadowy rafters and flickering  
lights,

At St. Abbs on the Berwickshire coast, to  
the skirl of the pipes,

The lift of the wave in his heels, the sea in  
his veins:

A Cherokee Indian, as though he were one  
with his horse,

His coppery shoulders agleam, his feathers  
afame

---

## HOOPS

---

With the last of the sun, descending a gulch  
in Alaska:

A brawny Cleveland puddler, stripped to the  
loins,

On the cauldron's brink, stirring the molten  
iron

In the white-hot glow, a man of white-hot  
metal:

A Cornish ploughboy driving an easy share  
Through the grey, light soil of a headland,  
against a sea

Of sapphire, gay in his new white cordu-  
roys,

Blue-eyed, dark-haired and whistling a care-  
less tune:

Jack Johnson, stripped for the ring, in his  
swarthy pride

Of sleek and rippling muscle . . .

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

MERRY ANDREW

Jack's the boy!

Ay, he's the proper figure of a man

But he'll grow fat and flabby and scant of  
breath.

He'll miss his hoop some day.

GENTLEMAN JOHN

But what are words

To shape the joy of form? The Greeks did  
best

To cut in marble or to cast in bronze

Their ecstasy of living. I remember

A marvellous Hermes that I saw in Athens,

Fished from the very bottom of the deep

Where he had lain, two thousand years or  
more,

Wrecked with a galley-full of Roman pirates,

---

## HOOPS

---

Among the white bones of his plunderers  
Whose flesh had fed the fishes as they sank,—  
Serene in cold imperishable beauty,  
Biding his time, till he should rise again,  
Exultant from the wave, for all men's worship,

The morning-spring of life, the youth of the  
world,

Shaped in sea-coloured bronze for everlasting.

Ay, the Greeks knew; but men have forgotten now.

Not easily do we meet beauty walking  
The world to-day in all the body's pride.  
That's why I'm here—a stable-boy to  
camels—

For in the circus-ring there's more delight  
Of seemly bodies, goodly in sheer health,



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Bodies trained and tuned to the perfect  
pitch,

Eager, blithe, debonair, from head to heel  
Aglow and alive in every pulse, than elsewhere

In this machine-ridden land of grimy, glum,  
Round-shouldered, coughing mechanics. Once  
I lived

In London, in a slum called Paradise,  
Sickened to see the greasy pavements crawling  
ing

With puny, flabby babies, thick as maggots.  
Poor brats! I'd soon go mad, if I'd to live  
In London, with its stunted men and women  
But little better to look on than myself.

Yet, there's an island where the men keep  
fit—

---

## HOOPS

---

St. Kilda's, a stark fastness of high crag:  
They must keep fit or famish; their main  
food

The Solan goose; and it's a chancy job  
To climb down a sheer face of slippery granite

And drop a noose over the sentinel bird  
Ere he can squawk to rouse the sleeping  
flock.

They must keep fit—their bodies taut and  
trim —

To have the nerve: and they're like tempered  
steel,

Suppled and fined. But even they've grown  
slacker

Through traffic with the mainland, in these  
days.

A hundred years ago, the custom held

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

That none should take a wife till he had  
stood,  
His left heel on the dizziest point of crag,  
His right leg and both arms, stretched in mid  
air,  
Above the sea: three hundred feet to  
drop  
To death, if he should fail—a Spartan  
test.  
But any man who could have failed, would  
scarce  
Have earned his livelihood, or his children's  
bread  
On that bleak rock.

MERRY ANDREW

*(Drowsily.)*

Ay, children—that's it, children!

---

## HOOPS

---

### GENTLEMAN JOHN

St. Kilda's children had a chance, at least,  
With none begotten idly of weakling fa-  
thers.

Spartan test for fatherhood! Should they  
miss  
Their hoop, 'twas death, and childless. You  
have still  
Six lives to take unending hoops for you,  
And you yourself are not done yet . . .

### MERRY ANDREW

*(More drowsily.)*

Not yet:  
And there's much comfort in the thought of  
children.  
They're bonnie boys enough; and should do  
well,

---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

If I can but keep going a little while,  
A little longer till . . .

GENTLEMAN JOHN

Six strapping sons!  
And I have naught but camels.

(*Pause.*)

Yet, I've seen  
A vision in this stable that puts to shame  
Each ecstasy of mortal flesh and blood  
That's been my eyes' delight. I never  
breathed

A word of it to man or woman yet:  
I couldn't whisper it now to you, if you  
looked

Like any human thing this side of death.  
'Twas on the night I stumbled on the circus.  
I'd wandered all day, lost among the fells,

---

## HOOPS

---

Over snow-smothered hills, through blinding  
blizzard,

Whipped by a wind that seemed to strip and  
skin me,

Till I was one numb ache of sodden ice.

Quite done, and drunk with cold, I'd soon  
have dropped

Dead in a ditch; when suddenly a lantern

Dazzled my eyes. I smelt a queer warm smell;

And felt a hot puff in my face; and blun-  
dered

Out of the flurry of snow and raking wind

Dizzily into a glowing Arabian night

Of elephants and camels having supper.

I thought that I'd gone mad, stark, staring  
mad:

But I was much too sleepy to mind just  
then—

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Dropped dead asleep upon a truss of hay;  
And lay, a log, till—well, I cannot tell  
How long I lay unconscious. I but know  
I slept, and wakened: and that 't was no  
dream.

I heard a rustle in the hay beside me;  
And opening sleepy eyes, scarce marvelling,  
I saw her, standing naked in the lamp-  
light,

Beneath the huge tent's cavernous canopy,  
Against the throng of elephants and camels  
That champed unwondering in the golden  
dusk,

Moon-white Diana, mettled Artemis—  
Her body, quick and tense as her own bow-  
string—

Her spirit, an arrow barbed and strung for  
flight—

---

## HOOPS

---

White snow-flakes melting on her night-black  
hair,

And on her glistening breasts and supple  
thighs:

Her red lips parted, her keen eyes alive  
With fierce, far-ranging hungers of the  
chase

Over the hills of morn . . . The lantern  
guttered:

And I was left alone in the outer darkness  
Among the champing elephants and camels.  
And I'll be a camel-keeper to the end:  
Though never again my eyes . . .

*(Pause.)*

So, you can sleep,  
You merry Andrew, for all you missed your  
hoop.



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

It's just as well, perhaps. Now I can hold  
My secret to the end. Ah, here they come!

*(Six lads, between the ages of three and twelve, clad  
in pink tights covered with silver spangles,  
tumble into the tent.)*

### THE ELDEST BOY

Daddy, the bell's rung, and . . .

### GENTLEMAN JOHN

He's snoozing sound.

*(To the youngest boy.)*

You just creep quietly, and take tight hold  
Of the crimson curls, and tug, and you will  
hear

The purple pussies all caterwaul at once.

1914

## THOROUGHFARES

TO EDWARD MARSH

## SOLWAY FORD

He greets you with a smile from friendly  
eyes;

But never speaks, nor rises from his bed:  
Beneath the green night of the sea he lies,  
The whole world's waters weighing on his  
head.

The empty wain made slowly over the sand;  
And he, with hands in pockets by the side  
Was trudging, deep in dream, the while he  
scanned

With blue, unseeing eyes the far-off tide:  
When, stumbling in a hole, with startled  
neigh,

His young horse reared; and, snatching at  
the rein,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

He slipped: the wheels crushed on him as he  
lay;

Then, tilting over him, the lumbering wain  
Turned turtle as the plunging beast broke free,  
And made for home: and pinioned and half-  
dead

He lay, and listened to the far-off sea;  
And seemed to hear it surging overhead  
Already; though 'twas full an hour or more  
Until high-tide, when Solway's shining flood  
Should sweep the shallow firth from shore  
to shore.

He felt a salty tingle in his blood;  
And seemed to stifle, drowning. Then again,  
He knew that he must lie a lingering while  
Before the sea might close above his pain,  
Although the advancing waves had scarce a  
mile

---

SOLWAY FORD

---

To travel, creeping nearer, inch by inch,  
With little runs and sallies over the sand.  
Cooped in the dark, he felt his body flinch  
From each chill wave as it drew nearer  
hand.

He saw the froth of each oncoming crest;  
And felt the tugging of the ebb and flow,  
And waves already breaking over his breast;  
Though still far-off they murmured, faint  
and low;

Yet, creeping nearer, inch by inch; and now  
He felt the cold drench of the drowning  
wave,

And the salt cold of death on lips and brow;  
And sank, and sank . . . while still, as in a  
grave,

In the close dark beneath the crushing cart,  
He lay, and listened to the far-off sea.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Wave after wave was knocking at his heart,  
And swishing, swishing, swishing cease-  
lessly

About the wain—cool waves that never  
reached

His cracking lips, to slake his hell-hot  
thirst . . .

Shrill in his ear a startled barn-owl  
screeched . . .

He smelt the smell of oil-cake . . . when  
there burst,

Through the big barn's wide-open door, the  
sea—

The whole sea sweeping on him with a  
roar . . .

He clutched a falling rafter, dizzily . . .

Then sank through drowning deeps, to rise  
no more.

---

## SOLWAY FORD

---

Down, ever down, a hundred years he sank  
Through cold green death, ten thousand  
fathom deep.

His fiery lips deep draughts of cold sea drank  
That filled his body with strange icy sleep,  
Until he felt no longer that numb ache,  
The dead-weight lifted from his legs at last:  
And yet, he gazed with wondering eyes awake  
Up the green glassy gloom through which he  
passed:

And saw, far overhead, the keels of ships  
Grow small and smaller, dwindling out of  
sight;

And watched the bubbles rising from his  
lips;

And silver salmon swimming in green night;  
And queer big, golden bream with scarlet fins  
And emerald eyes and fiery-flashing tails;



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Enormous eels with purple-spotted skins;  
And mammoth unknown fish with sapphire  
scales

That bore down on him with red jaws agape,  
Like yawning furnaces of blinding heat;  
And when it seemed to him as though escape  
From those hell-mouths were hopeless, his  
bare feet

Touched bottom: and he lay down in his place  
Among the dreamless legion of the drowned,  
The calm of deeps unsounded on his face,  
And calm within his heart; while all around  
Upon the midmost ocean's crystal floor  
The naked bodies of dead seamen lay,  
Dropped, sheer and clean, from hubbub,  
brawl and roar,

To peace, too deep for any tide to sway.

. . . . .

---

SOLWAY FORD

---

The little waves were lapping round the cart  
Already, when they rescued him from death.  
Life cannot touch the quiet of his heart  
To joy or sorrow, as, with easy breath,  
And smiling lips upon his back he lies,  
And never speaks, nor rises from his bed;  
Gazing through those green glooms with  
    happy eyes,  
While gold and sapphire fish swim overhead.

---

BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

A CATCH FOR SINGING

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old  
Man:

“Alack, and well-a-day!”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young  
Man:

“The cherry-tree’s in flourish!”

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old  
Man:

“The world is growing grey.”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young  
Man:

“The cherry-tree’s in flourish!”

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old  
Man:

“Both flower and fruit decay.”

---

A CATCH FOR SINGING

---

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young  
Man:

“The cherry-tree’s in flourish!”

Said the Old Young Man to the Young Old  
Man:

“Alack, and well-a-day!

The world is growing grey:

And flower and fruit decay.

Beware Old Man, beware Old Man!

For the end of life is nearing;

And the grave yawns by the way . . .”

Said the Young Old Man to the Old Young  
Man:

“I’m a trifle hard of hearing;

And can’t catch a word you say . . .

But the cherry-tree’s in flourish!”

GERANIUMS

Stuck in a bottle on the window-sill,  
In the cold gaslight burning gaily red  
Against the luminous blue of London night,  
These flowers are mine: while somewhere out  
    of sight

In some black-throated alley's stench and  
    heat,

Oblivious of the racket of the street,  
A poor old weary woman lies in bed.

Broken with lust and drink, blear-eyed and  
    ill,

Her battered bonnet nodding on her head,  
From a dark arch she clutched my sleeve  
    and said:

---

## GERANIUMS

---

“I’ve sold no bunch to-day, nor touched a  
bite . . .

Son, buy six-penn’orth; and ’t will mean a  
bed.”

So, blazing gaily red  
Against the luminous deeps  
Of starless London night,  
They burn for my delight:  
While somewhere, snug in bed,  
A worn old woman sleeps.

And yet to-morrow will these blooms be  
dead

With all their lively beauty; and to-morrow  
May end the light lusts and the heavy sor-  
row

Of that old body with the nodding head.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

The last oath muttered, the last pint drained  
    deep,  
She'll sink, as Cleopatra sank, to sleep;  
Nor need to barter blossoms for a bed.

---

## THE WHISPERERS

---

### THE WHISPERERS

As beneath the moon I walked,  
Dog-at-heel my shadow stalked,  
Keeping ghostly company:  
And as we went gallantly  
Down the fell-road, dusty-white,  
Round us in the windy night  
Bracken, rushes, bent and heather  
Whispered ceaselessly together:  
“Would he ever journey more,  
Ever stride so carelessly,  
If he knew what lies before,  
And could see what we can see?”

As I listened, cold with dread,  
Every hair upon my head  
Strained to hear them talk of me,



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Whispering, whispering ceaselessly:  
“Folly’s fool the man must be,  
Surely, since, though where he goes  
He knows not, his shadow knows:  
And his secret shadow never  
Utters warning words, or ever  
Seeks to save him from his fate,  
Reckless, blindfold, and unknown,  
Till death tells him all, too late,  
And his shadow walks alone.”

---

## MABEL

---

### MABEL

When Nigger Dick and Hell-for-Women  
slouched

Into the taproom of the "Duck and De'il,"  
The three Dalmatian pups slunk in at heel  
And down among the slushy saw-dust  
crouched;

But Mabel would not leave the windy street  
For any gaudy tavern's reek and heat—  
Not she! for Mabel was no spotted dog  
To crawl among the steaming muddy feet  
Beneath a bench, and slumber like a log.

And so she set her hoofs, and stayed outside,  
Though Hell-for-Women pushed the swing-  
door wide,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And “Mabel, darling! Mabel, darling!” cried,  
And Nigger Dick thrust out his head and  
    cursed

Until his tongue burned with so hot a thirst,  
He turned and swore that he’d not split his  
    throat

To save the soul of any giddy goat.

And then they left her, stubborn, wild and  
    white,

Snuffing the wet air of the windy night:  
And as she stood beneath a cold blue star  
That pierced the narrow strip of midnight sky  
Between the sleeping houses black and high,  
The glare and glitter of the reeking bar,  
And all the filth and squalor of the street  
Were blotted out . . .

and she was lost between

---

MABEL

---

The beetling crags of some deep, dark ra-  
vine

In Andalusian solitudes of stone,  
A trembling, young, bewildered nanny-goat  
Within the cold blue heart of night alone . . .  
Until her ears pricked, tingling to a bleat,  
As, far above her, on a naked scar,  
The dews of morning dripping from his  
beard,  
Rejoicing in his strength the herd-king  
reared,  
Shaking the darkness from his shaggy coat.

## THE VIXEN

The vixen made for Deadman's Flow,  
Where not a mare but mine could go;  
And three hounds only splashed across  
The quaking hags of mile-wide moss;  
Only three of the deadbeat pack  
Scrambled out by Lone Maid's Slack,  
Bolter, Tough, and Ne'er-Die-Nell:  
But as they broke across the fell  
The tongue they gave was good to hear,  
Lively music, clean and clear,  
Such as only light-coats make,  
Hot-trod through the girth-deep brake.

The vixen, draggled and nigh-spent,  
Twisted through the rimy bent

---

## THE VIXEN

---

Towards the Christhope Craggs. I thought  
Every earth stopt—winded—caught . . .  
She's a mask and brush! When white  
A squall of snow swept all from sight;  
And hoodman-blind, Lightfoot and I  
Battled with the roaring sky.

When southerly the snow had swept,  
Light broke, as the vixen crept  
Slinking up the stony brae.  
On a jutting scar she lay,  
Panting, lathered, while she eyed  
The hounds that took the stiff brae-side  
With yelping music, mad to kill.

Then vixen, hounds and craggy hill  
Were smothered in a blinding swirl:  
And when it passed, there stood a girl

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Where the vixen late had lain,  
Smiling down, as I drew rein,  
Baffled; and the hounds, deadbeat,  
Fawning at the young girl's feet,  
Whimpered, cowed, where her red hair,  
Streaming to her ankles bare,  
Turned as white among the heather  
As the vixen's brush's feather.

Flinching on my flinching mare,  
I watched her, gaping and astare,  
As she smiled with red lips wide,  
White fangs curving either side  
Of her lolling tongue . . . My thrapple  
Felt fear's fang: I strove, agrapple,  
Reeling . . . and again blind snow  
Closed like night.

No man may know

---

## THE VIXEN

---

How Lightfoot won through Deadman's Flow  
And naught I knew till, in the glow  
Of home's wide door, my wife's kind face  
Smiled welcome. And for me the chase,  
The last chase, ended. Though the pack  
Through the blizzard struggled back,  
Gone were Bolter, Tough and Nell,  
Where, the vixen's self can tell!  
Long we sought them, high and low,  
By Christhope Crag and Deadman's Flow,  
By slack and syke and hag: and found  
Never bone nor hair of hound.



## THE LODGING HOUSE

When up the fretful, creaking stair,  
From floor to floor  
I creep  
On tiptoe, lest I wake from their first beauty-  
sleep  
The unknown lodgers lying, layer on layer,  
In the packed house from roof to basement  
Behind each landing's unseen door;  
The well-known steps are strangely steep,  
And the old stairway seems to soar,  
For my amazement  
Hung in air,  
Flight on flight  
Through pitchy night,  
Evermore and evermore.

---

## THE LODGING HOUSE

---

And when at last I stand outside  
My garret-door I hardly dare  
To open it,  
Lest, when I fling it wide,  
With candle lit  
And reading in my only chair,  
I find myself already there . . .

And so must crawl back down the sheer  
    black pit  
Of hell's own stair,  
Past lodgers sleeping layer on layer,  
To seek a home I know not where.

## THE ICE

Her day out from the workhouse-ward, she  
stands,

A grey-haired woman, decent and precise,  
With prim black bonnet and neat paisley  
shawl,

Among the other children by the stall;  
And with grave relish eats a penny ice.

To wizened toothless gums, with quaking  
hands

She holds it, shuddering with delicious cold;  
Nor heeds the jeering laughter of young men—  
The happiest, in her innocence, of all:  
For, while their insolent youth must soon  
grow old,

She, who's been old, is now a child again.

---

## WOOLGATHERING

---

### WOOLGATHERING

Youth that goes woolgathering,  
Mooning and stargazing,  
Always finding everything  
Full of fresh amazing,  
Best will meet the moment's need  
When the dream brings forth the deed.

He who keeps through all his days  
Open eyes of wonder  
Is the lord of skiey ways,  
And the earth thereunder:  
For the heart to do and sing  
Comes of youth's woolgathering.

## THE TRAM

Humming and creaking, the car down the  
street

Lumbered and lurched through thunderous  
gloom

Bearing us, spent and dumb with the heat,  
From office and counter and factory home:

Sallow-faced clerks, genteel in black;  
Girls from the laundries, draggled and dank;  
Ruddy-faced labourers slouching slack;  
A broken actor, grizzled and lank;

A mother with querulous babe on her lap;  
A schoolboy whistling under his breath;  
An old man crouched in a dreamless nap;  
A widow with eyes on the eyes of death;

---

## THE TRAM

---

A priest; a sailor with deepsea gaze;  
A soldier in scarlet with waxed moustache;  
A drunken trollop in velvet and lace;  
All silent in that tense dusk . . . when a  
flash

Of lightning shivered the sultry gloom:  
With shattering brattle the whole sky fell  
About us, and rapt to a dazzling doom  
We glided on in a timeless spell,

Unscathed through deluge and flying fire  
In a magical chariot of streaming glass,  
Cut off from our kind and the world's desire,  
Made one by the awe that had come to pass.

ON THE EMBANKMENT

Down on the sunlit ebb, with the wind in her  
sails, and free  
Of cable and anchor, she swept rejoicing to  
seek the sea.

And my eyes and my heart swept out with  
her,  
When at my elbow I felt a stir;  
And glancing down, I saw a lad—  
A shambling lad with shifty air,  
Weak-chested, stunted and ill-clad,  
Who watched her with unseeing stare.

Dull, watery grey eyes he had  
Blinking beneath the slouching cap

---

## ON THE EMBANKMENT

---

That hid the low-browed, close-cropped head:  
And as I turned to him he said  
With hopeless hangdog air:  
“Just out of gaol three days ago;  
And I’ll be back before I know:  
For nothing else is left a chap  
When once he’s been inside . . . and  
so . . .”

Then dumb he stood with sightless stare  
Set on the sunlit, windy sail of the far-off  
boat that free  
Of cable and anchor still swept on rejoicing  
to seek the sea.

My heart is a sunlit, windy sail:  
My heart is a hopeless lad in gaol.



## THE DANCERS

'Neath a thorn as white as snow,  
High above the peacock sea,  
Hither, thither, to and fro,  
Merrily the grey rats go:  
To the song of ebb and flow  
Moving as to melody.

Over gnarled roots, high and low,  
Twisting, frisking fearlessly,  
Six young hearts that needs must know,  
When the ragged thorn's in blow,  
Spring, and Spring's desire, and so  
Dance, above the dancing sea.

---

## THE WIND

---

### THE WIND

To the lean, clean land, to the last cold  
height,  
You shall come with a whickering breath,  
From the depths of despair or the depths of  
delight,  
Stript stark to the wind of death.

And whether you're sinless, or whether you've  
sinned,  
It's useless to whimper and whine;  
For the lean, clean blade of the cut-throat  
wind  
Will slit your weasand, and mine.

THE VINDICTIVE STAIRCASE

OR

THE REWARD OF INDUSTRY

In a doomed and empty house in Hounds-  
ditch

All night long I lie awake and listen,  
While all night the ghost of Mrs. Murphy  
Tiptoes up and down the wheezy staircase,  
Sweeling ghostly grease of quaking candles.

Mrs. Murphy, timidest of spectres,  
You who were the cheeriest of charers,  
With the heart of innocence and only  
Torn between a zest for priests and porter,  
Mrs. Murphy of the ample bosom,—  
Suckler of a score or so of children

---

## THE VINDICTIVE STAIRCASE

---

("Children? Bless you! Why, I've buried  
six, Sir.")

Who in forty years wore out three husbands

And one everlasting, shameless bonnet  
Which I've little doubt was confined with  
you—

Mrs. Murphy, wherefor do you wander,  
Sweeling ghostly grease of quaking candles,  
Up and down the stairs you scrubbed so  
sorely,  
Scrubbed till they were naked, dank, and  
aching?

Now that you are dead, is this their vengeance?

Recollecting all you made them suffer  
With your bristled brush and soapy water

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

When you scrubbed them naked, dank and  
aching,  
Have they power to hold your ghostly foot-  
steps  
Chained as to an everlasting treadmill?

Mrs. Murphy, think you 't would appease them  
If I rose now in my shivering nightshirt,  
Rose and told them how you, too, had suf-  
fered—  
You, their seeming tyrant, but their bond-  
slave—  
Toiling uncomplaining in their service,  
Till your knuckles and your knees were  
knotted  
Into writhing fires of red rheumatics,  
And how, in the end, 't was they who killed  
you?

---

## THE VINDICTIVE STAIRCASE

---

Even should their knots still harden to you,  
Bow your one and all-enduring bonnet  
Till your ear is level with my keyhole,  
While I whisper ghostly consolation:  
Know this house is marked out for the  
    spoiler,  
Doomed to fall to Hobnails with his pickaxe;  
And its crazy staircase chopped to firewood,  
Splintered, bundled, burned to smoke and  
    ashes,  
Soon shall perish, scattered to the fourwinds.  
Then, God rest your spirit, Mrs. Murphy!

Yet, who knows! A staircase . . . Mrs.  
    Murphy,  
God forbid that you be doomed to tiptoe  
Through eternity, a timid spectre,  
Sweeling ghostly grease of quaking candles,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Up and down the spectre of a staircase,  
While all night I lie awake and listen  
In a damned and ghostly house in Hounds-  
ditch!

---

## RAGAMUFFINS

---

### RAGAMUFFINS

Few folk like the wind's way;  
Fewer folk like mine,—  
Folk who rise at nine,  
Who live to drudge and dine,  
Who never see the starry light,  
And sleep in the same bed each night  
Under the same roof;  
When the rascal wind and I  
Happen to be gadding by,  
Gentlefolk, so fat and fine  
Beg to hold aloof,  
Leaving us to starlit beds, and husks amid  
the swine.

Few folk like the wind's song,  
And fewer folk like mine,—



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Folk who trudge the trodden way,  
Who keep the track and never stray,  
Who think the sun's for making hay,—  
Folk who cannot dance or play,  
Faultless folk and fine.  
Yet, the wind and I are gay,  
In our ragamuffin way,  
Singing, storm or shine.

---

## THE ALARUM

---

### THE ALARUM

Stark to the skin, I crawled a knife-edged  
blade

Of melting ice above the pit of Hell,  
Flame-licked and scorched; yet strangely un-  
dismayed,

Till on my ears a dizzy clamour fell,  
And dropt me sheer . . . and, wakening in  
my bed,

I saw the sky, beyond the chimneys red  
And heard the crazy clanging of a bell.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

### IN A RESTAURANT

He wears a red rose in his buttonhole,  
A city-clerk on Sunday dining out:  
And as the music surges over the din  
The heady quavering of the violin  
Sings through his blood, and puts old cares  
to rout,  
And tingles, quickening, through his shrunken  
soul,

Till he forgets his ledgers, and the prim  
Black, crabbèd figures, and the qualmy smell  
Of ink and musty leather and leadglaze,  
As, in eternities of Summer days,  
He dives through shivering waves, or rides  
the swell  
On rose-red seas of melody aswim.

---

## THE GREETING

---

### THE GREETING

“What fettle, mate?” to me he said  
As he went by  
With lifted head  
And laughing eye,  
Where, black against the dawning red,  
The pit-heaps cut the sky:  
“What fettle, mate?”

“What fettle, mate?” to him I said,  
As he went by  
With shrouded head  
And darkened eye,  
Borne homeward by his marrows, dead  
Beneath the noonday sky:  
“What fettle, mate?”

## WHEELS

To safety of the curb he thrust the crone:  
When a shaft took him in the back, and prone  
He tumbled heavily, but all unheard  
Amid the scurry of wheels that crashed and  
whirred

About his senseless head—his helmet crushed  
Like crumpled paper by a car that rushed  
Upon him unaware. And as he lay  
He heard again the wheels he'd heard all day  
About him on point-duty . . . only now  
Each red-hot wheel ran searing over his  
brow—

A sizzling star with hub and spokes and tyre  
One monstrous Catherine-wheel of sparking  
fire

---

## WHEELS

---

Whirring down windy tunnels of the  
night . . .

That Catherine-wheel, somehow it will not  
light—

Fixed to the broken paling; and the pin

Pricks the boy's finger as he jabs it in:

He sucks the salty blood—the spiteful thing

Fires, whizzing, sputtering sparks: he feels  
them sting

His wincing cheek; and, on the damp night-  
air,

The stench of burnt saltpetre and singed  
hair . . .

While still he lies and listens without fear

To the loud traffic rumbling in his ear—

Wheels rumbling in his ear, and through his  
brain

For evermore, a never-ending train

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Of scarlet postal-vans that whirl one red  
Perpetual hot procession through his head—  
His head that's just a clanking, clattering  
mill

Of grinding wheels . . . and down an endless  
hill

After his hoop he runs, a little lad,  
Barefooted 'neath the stars, in nightshirt  
clad—

And stumbles into bed, the stars all gone  
Though in his head the hoop keeps running  
on

And on and on: his head grown big and wide  
Holds all the windy night and stars in-  
side . . .

And still within a hair's breadth of his ear  
The crunch and gride of wheels rings sharp  
and clear—

---

## WHEELS

---

Huge lumbering wagons, crusted axle-deep  
With country marl, their drivers half-asleep  
Against green toppling mounds of cab-  
bages

Still crisp with dewy airs, or stacks of  
cheese

Smelling of Arcady, till all the sky'  
In clouds of cheese and cabbages rolls by—  
Great golden cheeses wheeling through the  
night,

And giant cabbages of emerald light  
That tumble after, scattering crystal drops . . .  
While in his ear the grinding never stops—  
Wheels grinding asphalt . . . then a high-  
piled wain

Of mignonette in boxes . . . and again,  
A baby at his father's cottage-door  
He toddles, treading on his pinafore,



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And tumbles headlong in a bed of bloom,  
Half-smothered in the deep, sweet honeyed  
    gloom  
Of crushed, wet blossom, and the hum of  
    bees—  
Big bumble-bees that buzz through flowery  
    trees—  
Grows furious . . . changing to a roar of  
    wheels  
And honk of hooting horns: and now he  
    feels  
That all the cars in London filled with  
    light  
Are bearing down upon him through the  
    night,  
As out of hall and theatre there pour  
White-shouldered women, ever more and  
    more,

---

## WHEELS

---

Bright-eyed, with flashing teeth, borne in a  
throng

Of purring, glittering cars, ten thousand  
strong:

Each drowsy dame, and eager chattering lass  
Laughing unheard within her box of glass . . .

And then great darkness, and a clanging bell—

Clanging beneath the hollow dome of hell

Aglow like burnished copper; and a roar

Of wheels and wheels and wheels for ever-  
more,

As engine after engine crashes by

With clank and rattle under that red sky

Dropping a trail of burning coals behind,

That scorch his eyeballs till he lies half-blind,

Smouldering to cinder in a vasty night

Of wheeling worlds and stars in whirling  
flight,

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

And suns that blaze in thunderous fury on  
For ever and for ever, yet are gone  
Ere he can gasp to see them . . . head to  
heels

Slung round a monstrous red-hot hub, that  
wheels

Across infinity, with spokes of fire  
That dwindle slowly till the shrinking tyre  
Is clamped like aching ice about his head . . .

He smells clean acid smells: and safe in bed  
He wakens in a lime-washed ward, to hear  
Somebody moaning almost in his ear,  
And knows that it's himself that moans: and  
then,

Battling his way back to the world of men,  
He sees with leaden eyelids opening wide,  
His young wife gravely knitting by his side.

---

## PROMETHEUS

---

### PROMETHEUS

All day beneath the bleak, indifferent skies,  
Broken and blind, a shivering bag of bones,  
He trudges over icy paving stones,  
And “Matches! Matches! Matches!  
Matches!” cries.

And now beneath the dismal, dripping night  
And shadowed by a deeper night, he stands:  
And yet he holds within his palsied hands  
Quick fire enough to set his world alight.

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

### NIGHT

Suddenly kindling the skylight's pitchy  
square,

The eyes of a cat, sinister, glassy and green,  
Caught by a trick of the light in a senseless  
stare . . .

And the powers of the older night, abhorrent,  
obscene,

Each from his den of darkness and loathly  
lair,

Slink to my bedside, and gibber and mow,  
and fill

My heart with the Fear of the Fen and the  
Dread of the Hill

And the Terror that stalks by night through  
the Wood of Doom.

---

## NIGHT

---

And things that are headless and nameless  
throng the room:

The cold webbed fingers of witches are in  
my hair:

The clammy lips of the warlock are clenched  
to mine:

The Eel of the bottomless pit of Deadman's  
Bog

Slithers an icy spiral about my spine:

A corpse-clutch freezes my midriff, the foul  
reek of Fog . . .

When my hand is licked by the warm wet  
tongue of my dog;

The eyes blink out; and Horror slinks back  
to her den;

And I breathe again.

ON HAMPSTEAD HEATH

Against the green flame of the hawthorn-tree,  
His scarlet tunic burns;  
And livelier than the green sap's mantling  
    glee  
The Spring fire tingles through him headily  
As quivering he turns

And stammers out the old amazing tale  
Of youth and April weather;  
While she, with half-breathed jests that, sob-  
    bing, fail,  
Sits, tight-lipped, quaking, eager-eyed and  
    pale,  
Beneath her purple feather.

---

A VISION IN A TEA-SHOP

---

A VISION IN A TEA-SHOP

His hair lit up the tea-shop like a fire,  
The naked flame of youth made manifest—  
Young hunger's unappeasable desire  
Devouring cakes and cream with eager zest:

While cheek by jowl, an old man, bald and  
blind

And peaked and withered as a waning moon,  
With toothless, mumbling gums, and waning  
dering mind

Supped barley-water from a tremulous spoon.

I turned a moment: and the man was gone:  
And as I looked upon the red-haired boy,  
About him in a blinding glory shone  
The sons of morning singing together for joy.



LINES

Addressed to the Spectre of an Elderly Gentleman, recently demised, Whom the Author had once observed performing a Benevolent Office in the Vicinity of Holborn, W. C.

I saw you, seated on a horse's head,  
While the blaspheming carter cut the traces,  
Obese, white-waistcoated, and newly fed,  
Through bland, indifferent monocle surveying  
The gaping circle of indifferent faces.

And now, the news has come that you are  
dead,

I see you, while they cut the tangled traces,

---

LINES

---

On your own hearse's fallen horse's head,  
Through bland, indifferent monocle survey-  
ing  
The unseeing circle of funereal faces.

## THE DREADNOUGHT

Breasting the tide of the traffic, the “Dread-  
nought” comes,

Be-ribboned and gay, the first of the holiday  
brakes,

Brimful of broken old women, a parish’s  
mothers,

Bearing them out for the day from grey al-  
leys and slums—

A day in the forest of Epping grown green  
for their sakes.

Listless and stolid they crouch, everlastingly  
tired,

Mere bundles of patience outworn, half-deaf  
and half-blind,

---

## THE DREADNOUGHT

---

Save only one apple-cheeked grannie, more  
brisk than the others,  
Who, remembering, with youth in her eyes  
and the old dreams desired,  
Sits kissing her hand to the drivers who follow behind.

SIGHT

By the lamplit stall I loitered, feasting my  
eyes

On colours ripe and rich for the heart's de-  
sire—

Tomatoes, redder than Krakatoa's fire,  
Oranges like old sunsets over Tyre,  
And apples golden-green as the glades of  
Paradise.

And as I lingered, lost in divine delight,  
My heart thanked God for the goodly gift  
of sight

And all youth's lively senses keen and  
quick . . .

When suddenly, behind me in the night,  
I heard the tapping of a blind man's stick.

---

## THE GORSE

---

### THE GORSE

In dream, again within the clean, cold hell  
Of glazed and aching silence he was trapped;  
And, closing in, the blank walls of his cell  
Crushed stifling on him . . . when the  
    bracken snapped,  
Caught in his clutching fingers: and he lay  
Awake upon his back among the fern,  
With free eyes travelling the wide blue day  
Unhindered, unremembering; while a burn  
Tinkled and gurgled somewhere out of sight,  
Unheard of him, till, suddenly aware  
Of its cold music, shivering in the light,  
He raised himself; and with far-ranging stare  
Looked all about him: and, with dazed eyes  
    wide

---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

Saw, still as in a numb, unreal dream,  
Black figures scouring a far hill-side,  
With now and then a sunlit rifle's gleam;  
And knew the hunt was hot upon his track:  
Yet hardly seemed to mind, somehow, just  
then . . .

But kept on wondering why they looked so  
black

On that hot hillside, all those little men  
Who scurried round like beetles—twelve, all  
told . . .

He counted them twice over; and began  
A third time reckoning them, but could not  
hold

His starved wits to the business, while they ran  
So brokenly, and always stuck at "five" . . .  
And "One, two, three, four, five" a dozen  
times

---

## THE GORSE

---

He muttered . . . “Can you catch a fish  
alive?”

Sang mocking echoes of old nursery-rhymes  
Through the strained, tingling hollow of his  
head.

And now almost remembering, he was stirred  
To pity them; and wondered if they'd fed  
Since he had, or if, ever since they'd heard  
Two nights ago the sudden signal-gun  
That raised alarm of his escape, they, too,  
Had fasted in the wilderness, and run  
With nothing but the thirsty wind to chew,  
And nothing in their bellies but a fill  
Of cold peat-water, till their heads were  
light . . .

The crackling of a rifle on the hill  
Rang in his ears; and stung to headlong flight,



---

## BORDERLANDS AND THOROUGHFARES

---

He started to his feet; and through the brake  
He plunged in panic, heedless of the sun  
That burned his cropped head to a red-hot  
ache

Still racked with crackling echoes of the  
gun.

Then suddenly the sun-enkindled fire  
Of gorse upon the moor-top caught his eye;  
And that gold glow held all his heart's desire,  
As, like a witless, flame-bewildered fly,  
He blundered towards the league-wide yellow  
blaze,

And tumbled headlong on the spikes of  
bloom;

And rising, bruised and bleeding and adaze,  
Struggled through clutching spines: the dense  
sweet fume

Of nutty, acrid scent like poison stealing

---

## THE GORSE

---

Through his hot blood: the bristling yellow  
glare

Spiking his eyes with fire, till he went reeling,  
Stifling and blinded, on—and did not care  
Though he were taken—wandering round  
and round,

“Jerusalem the Golden” quavering shrill,  
Changing his tune to “Tommy Tiddler’s  
Ground”:

Till, just a lost child on that dazzling hill,  
Bewildered in a glittering golden maze  
Of stinging scented fire, he dropped, quite  
done,

A shrivelling wisp within a world ablaze  
Beneath a blinding sky, one blaze of sun.

*1908-14*



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